



School District Consolidation

An Overview of State Action

Reasons not to Consolidate

- Loss of economic draw.
- Loss of community identity.
- Large schools vs.. small schools.
 - ◆ Climate
 - ◆ Bureaucracy
- Commute for students/transportation costs.
 - ◆ Decreased level of student involvement
- No true cost savings/improvement of services.
- Political climate of community

Optimal size of school and district

Differing opinions...

1981 Study suggests

- Optimal size of high schools to be 1000 - 2000 students.
- Optimal size of school district to be 10,000 students.

Optimal size of school and district

Differing opinions...

2001 Study by Duncombe and Yinger suggests

- Optimal (lowest cost) size of district is 6,000 students for total costs.
- 1,500 to 3,500 for operating or instructional costs.
- 1,000 for transportation costs.

Optimal size of school and district

Differing opinions...

1995 Study by Duncombe, Miner, and
Ruggiero suggests

- Ninety percent of cost savings are exhausted at 1,500 students.

State Activity Re: Consolidation

ARKANSAS

- 1983 - 1999 districts decreased from 370 to 310.
- More consolidations anticipated due to perceived cost savings and Supreme Court ruling mandating equal and efficient education for all students.
- Governor Huckabee proposes legislation to consolidate all school districts under 500 students.

State Activity Re: Consolidation

ARKANSAS

Very contentious.

- Optimum size of school and district being debated.
- Economies of scale on actual savings being disputed.
- Legislature not totally supportive of Governor's Plan.
- If not passed by Legislature, Governor to put on ballot for public vote in 2004.

State Activity Re: Consolidation

NORTH DAKOTA

- 1970 - 1994 districts decreased from 256 to 186.
- In 1994 closed schools had 47-97 students.
- Consolidated schools had 75-677.
- Most efficient districts have 600 - 5,000 students.
- Fifteen districts average 4,400 students the rest average 225.

State Activity Re: Consolidation

NORTH DAKOTA

- Funding not equitable - smallest districts can receive up to \$1,000 more per student than larger schools.
- Even with population increase during last decade, rural schools are losing students.
- Pros - students better off academically and socially.
- Cons - Quality of life in vacated communities declined.

State Activity Re: Consolidation

ILLINOIS

- 1980 - 2002 districts decreased from 1,001 to 893.
 - ◆ 51% through Dissolution/Annexation
 - ◆ 38% through Consolidation
 - ◆ 11% through Conversion, Deactivation, or Cooperative.

State Activity Re: Consolidation

ILLINOIS

- Major impetus for consolidation were financial incentives implemented by legislature.
 - ◆ State aid for new district if less than before consolidation. *For 4 years*
 - ◆ Teacher Salary Difference. *State pd diff between 2 districts so both got higher salary # years ???*
 - ◆ Deficit Offset.
 - ◆ Supplementary aid for certified employees. *1, 2 or 3 years up to 4,000 each employee to retain*

State Activity Re: Consolidation

KANSAS

- 1945 - 1984 districts decreased from 8,000 to 303.
- January 2003 recommendation to reduce further to approximately 40 Regional Education Districts.
- Legislation passed to dissolve current unified school districts and restructure along county boundaries by 2005.

State Activity Re: Consolidation

KANSAS

- State task force created to outline steps for creating Regional Education Districts (RED).
- Establish Pilot RED.
- Define suitable education for all students.
- Plan transition funding to include key elements of a good fiscal formula.
- Consult with state activities/athletics association.

State Activity Re: Consolidation

KANSAS

- Develop plan to phase in RED concept over a 5 to 10 year period. *4 years 1-2 share 3-4 gov 5-7 Reduce schools as necessary*
- Insure appropriate and qualified instructional staffing.
- Provide for districts with special circumstances. *geographic isolation*

State Activity Re: Consolidation

Some other states:

- Montana
- Nebraska
- Minnesota
- Iowa
- ■ West Virginia
- New York

No cost
Savings

Trends in Consolidation Process

- Incentives work better than mandates.
- Community engagement is important.
- Cost savings may or may not be significant based on economies of scale.
- Cultures of different districts may help or impede the consolidation process.
- Geographic location and topography may determine feasibility of consolidation.

Resources

- *Does School District Consolidation Cut Costs?* Center for Policy Research Paper No. 22, 2001.
- ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.
- Consolidation at-a-glance, National Association of State Boards of Education, Winter 2003.
- School District Reorganization, Illinois State Board of Education.
- *Regional Concept for Reorganization of Kansas School Districts*, January 2003. Little and Kennedy.
- NCSL Legislative Tracking.



For more information

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